

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 123903

EXDIS, FOR CHARGE

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1, -2

TAGS: PEPR, PBOR, XF, SY, LE, IS, UNSC

SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON: SYRIAN ROLE

1. PLEASE GET IN TOUCH WITH KHADDAM AS SOON AS POSSIBLE TO
MAKE THE FOLLOWING MAJOR POINTS (CONSISTENT WITH BASIC
STRATEGY TOWARD SOUTH LEBANON SITUATION COVERED SEPTTEL):

-- WE ARE PRESENTLY PRESSING THE ISRAELIS TO SET A SPECIFIC
DATE AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE FOR FINAL WITHDRAWAL FROM LEBANON.
BEGIN PROMISED THE SECRETARY DURING HIS WASHINGTON VISIT
THAT HE WOULD DO SO AFTER HIS RETURN TO ISRAEL. UNFOR-
TUNATELY, PALESTINIAN EFFORTS TO INFILTRATE UNIFIL'S AREA
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OF OPERATION COULD CAUSE THE ISRAELIS TO RESIST SETTING A
FINAL DATE, BUT WE INTEND TO KEEP PRESSING.

-- WE RECOGNIZE THAT, IN THEIR MOST RECENT EXCHANGES WITH
AMBASSADOR MURPHY BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE, AND ON EARLIER
OCCASIONS, KHADDAM AND ASSAD INDICATED IN EFFECT THAT SYRIA
COULD NOT DO ANYTHING WHICH WOULD BE SEEN AS SERVING

ISRAEL'S INTEREST OR AS PROTECTING ISRAEL WHILE IT REMAINED IN OCCUPATION OF PART OF SOUTHERN LEBANON. WE BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT SYRIA AND THE U.S. SHARE A COMMON INTEREST IN ENHANCING STABILITY IN LEBANON GENERALLY AND IN MINIMIZING THE POSSIBILITIES OF MISUNDERSTANDINGS OR

MISCALCULATIONS WHICH COULD LEAD TO BROADER HOSTILITIES.

-- THE U.S. BELIEVES THAT SYRIA HAS PLAYED AN INDISPENSABLE AND CONSTRUCTIVE ROLE IN LEBANON, WHICH HAS OFTEN BEEN THANKLESS AND WHICH HAS OFTEN CAUSED SYRIA SERIOUS PROBLEMS. WE HOPE AND TRUST THAT THE SYRIAN FORCES WITHIN THE ADF WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY THEIR VITAL ROLE IN PRESERVING SECURITY AND IN SUPPORTING THE AUTHORITY AND INTEGRITY OF THE SARKIS GOVERNMENT, DESPITE THE AGGRAVATIONS WHICH ARE INEVITABLE.

-- WE WOULD NOW LIKE TO EXPLORE WITH SYRIA WHETHER SYRIA COULD CONSIDER DEPLOYING ITS FORCES IN THE NO-MAN'S LAND ABOVE THE LITANI AND BELOW THE POINTS WHERE SYRIAN FORCES IN THE ADF ARE NOW POSITIONED, AFTER ISRAELIS HAVE WITHDRAWN. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE BE ABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE DEGREE OF SYRIAN WILLINGNESS AND FLEXIBILITY IN THIS REGARD, SINCE IT COULD HAVE A BEARING ON OUR TACTICS IN BRINGING ISRAELIS TO WITHDRAW FINALLY. EVEN IF SYRIA IS UNWILLING TO CONSIDER AT THIS TIME GOING AS FAR AS THE
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LITANI BRIDGES, WE WOULD BE INTERESTED IN ASCERTAINING WHETHER THEY MIGHT AT LEAST CONSIDER MOVING TO SUCH KEY SPOTS AS NABATIYAH, WHICH IS ONLY A FEW KILOMETERS BELOW PRESENT SYRIAN POSITIONS.

-- WE WOULD OF COURSE RESPECT SYRIAN CONFIDENCES SCRUPULOUSLY, OR ANY ALTERNATIVE SUGGESTIONS THE SYRIANS MIGHT HAVE. WE ARE CONVINCED, HOWEVER, THAT A STRONG EFFORT MUST BE MADE TO NEUTRALIZE THE PALESTINIAN CAPACITY TO CAUSE FURTHER MAJOR PROVOCATIONS WHICH THE ISRAELIS COULD BE EXPECTED TO RESPOND TO MILITARILY.

-- IN THE IMMEDIATE PERIOD AHEAD, WE ARE ESPECIALLY CONCERNED THAT ARAFAT AND THE MAINLINE PLO/FATAH ELEMENTS HE LEADS WILL ATTEMPT TO CHALLENGE UNIFIL'S AUTHORITY. IT IS PROBABLY IMPOSSIBLE TO EXPECT THE REJECTIONISTS TO BEHAVE THEMSELVES, BUT ARAFAT AND THE PLO HAVE A GREAT DEAL TO LOSE--IN TERMS OF INTERNATIONAL RESPECTABILITY AND ACCEPTANCE--IF THEY PURSUE THE COURSE THEY APPEAR BENT ON AT THE PRESENT.

-- WE THEREFORE HOPE THAT SYRIA WOULD ATTEMPT TO INFLUENCE

THE PALESTINIAN LEADERS TO COOPERATE WITH UNIFIL. IF THEY DO NOT DO SO, THERE IS A REAL RISK THAT UNIFIL COULD BEGIN TO UNRAVEL BECAUSE OF AN UNACCEPTABLE LEVEL OF CASUALTIES. THIS WOULD BE A GRAVE DEVELOPMENT, WHICH COULD POSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS FOR SYRIA AND THE ARAB STATES, WHILE DASHING FOR THE TIME BEING ANY HOPE THAT LEBANESE GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY COULD EVENTUALLY BE EXTENDED TO SOUTH LEBANON.

AN UNRAVELING OF UNIFIL MIGHT WELL MEAN THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD NOT WITHDRAW FROM SOUTH LEBANON OR WOULD BE TEMPTED TO RETURN AFTER THEIR WITHDRAWAL.

-- WE RECOGNIZE THERE ARE THOSE IN THE PALESTINIAN MOVEMENT WHO WOULD LIKE NOTHING BETTER THAN A CONTINUED
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ISRAELI OCCUPATION OF LEBANESE TERRITORY, IN ORDER TO MOBILIZE THE PALESTINIAN RESISTANCE MORE EFFECTIVELY AND PERHAPS TO BRING OTHER INTERNATIONAL PRESSURES TO BEAR. WE ARE SURE THAT SYRIA WOULD DISAGREE WITH THIS PALESTINIAN VIEWPOINT, WHICH CAN SIMPLY LEAD TO EVER GREATER FRICTIONS AND DANGERS IN THE AREA.

-- WE WOULD WELCOME A CONTINUING EXCHANGE OF VIEWS WITH SYRIA ON THESE IMPORTANT ISSUES.

2. FOR CHARGE: YOU WILL RECOGNIZE THAT YOUR PRESENTATION MUST NOT IN ANY SENSE GIVE THE IMPRESSION THAT WE ARE CONVEYING WARNINGS ON BEHALF OF ISRAEL. YOU MIGHT STRESS THAT WE ARE NOT AUTHORIZED OR ATTEMPTING TO SPEAK FOR ISRAEL. INSTEAD, WE FEEL IT IMPORTANT AT THIS STAGE TO SHARE OUR CONCERNS AND IDEAS WITH SYRIA. VANCE

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